

1961

THE LIGHTER SIDE WAIT! DON'T THROW THAT AWAY!

by Dick West - United Press International

Washington - The General Services Administration recently brought out a report which serves to illuminate a deep-seated American trait. I refer to our national reluctance to throw anything away.

Even as I write this, I can look about my desk and see stacks of literature I have saved on the off chance that I might need it someday. Just now I extracted a couple of papers for a random sample and this is what I found:

- . A newspaper clipping indicating that the first filibuster was staged in 412 A.D. by the Visigoths and
- . A copy of the "GOP Victory Wheel" published at the onset of the recent campaign.

At the moment, I can foresee no earthly need for this material and I certainly hope I never have an unearthly need for it. But there it is and there it probably will remain.

I can appreciate, therefore, as I'm sure you can, the problem that the General Services Administration is up against. The GSA has to collect, store and process non-current records for the entire federal government. And it can't throw anything away without permission of the originating agency.

In a report on its fiscal 1960 operations, the GSA revealed that it had managed to discard, burn or otherwise destroy 416,106 cubic feet of old government letters, receipts and other documents.

Let us pause and ponder this for a moment. I estimate the size of my living room at about 3,000 cubic feet. Therefore, the GSA threw away enough papers during the year to fill my living room some 138 times.

This would seem to indicate that the government is making some headway in its neverending struggle to avoid being buried by a paperwork avalanche of its own creation. But...

During this same fiscal year, the inventory of the 14 record warehouses operated by the GSA increased by 623,944 cubic feet.

Thus, despite a record number of papers destroyed, the GSA continued to lose ground. New papers piled up faster than it could get rid of the old ones. At year's end, it had on hand 5,301,331 cubic feet of records, or enough to fill my living room some 1,767 times.

Since 1950, the transfer of non-current records to the GSA has enabled the agencies to clear 5,100,000 square feet of space by emptying nearly a half million filing cabinets and a million linear feet of shelving.

It is safe to assume, however, that enough new stuff has been written, typed, printed and mimeographed to keep the cabinets and shelves full. It is even safer to assume that some agencies have had to buy additional cabinets and shelves.